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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted in Spring 1979 to determine the characteristics of a scientifically drawn sample of 16,400 curriculum and continuing education students enrolled in 57 community colleges and technical institutes in North Carolina (NC). The study focused on: (1) the demographic and financial characteristics of the students; (2) the major differences between curriculum and continuing education students; (3) the extent to which the students were representative of the adult population in NC; (4) how student characteristics had changed over the past ten years; (5) the factors which attracted the students to their institutions; (6) how the students learned of institutional offerings; and (7) what plans the students had for employment or continuing their education. Major findings indicated that while the majority of respondents perceived their institutions as the major vehicle for educational opportunity, a large proportion were not aware of the availability of support services. Recruitment practices on the part of two-year institutions weighed heavily in students' institutional choice, as did school location and low instructional costs. Enrollment trends showed that the NC colleges serve an increasingly representative cross-segment of the state's adult population, and, at the same time, serve unique sub-populations of non-traditional students. (JP)

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1979 PROFILE OF NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND TECHNICAL INSTITUTE GRADUATES

A Preliminary Summary of Findings

Presented to the American Educational Research Association Special Interest Group for Community/Junior College Research

Boston, Massachusetts

April 7, 1980

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INTRODUCTION

A continuing challenge facing teachers, administrators and policy makers of two-year post-secondary educational institutions is to maintain a current knowledge base on their students and to keep abreast of changes in student characteristics over time. Current operating and planning decisions need to reflect the needs of the students being enrolled as well as potential students. Thus, the purpose of this study was to develop an in-depth knowledge base on student characteristics by seeking answers to the following questions:

-- Who are the students being served by the North Carolina Community College System?

-- What are the major differences between curriculum and continuing education students?

-- To what extent are the students representative of the adult population in North Carolina?

-- How are student profiles changing?

-- What attracts students to these kinds of institutions?

-- How do students learn of institutional offerings and who influences their decisions to attend?

-- What are student plans for employment and continuing education?

These are but a few of the more than 15 questions being answered in a state-wide study of a scientifically drawn sample of more than 16,400 curriculum and continuing education students

enrolled in 57 community colleges and technical institutes in North Carolina. Data were collected in the late spring of 1979 by having students respond to a 48 item machine scoreable questionnaire. A summary of a few of the major findings are reported herein.*

WHO ARE THE STUDENTS?

Since community colleges and technical institutes enroll a diverse group of students, no single student profile will be presented. Rather, major student profiles will be presented for curriculum and continuing education students. These two major groupings of students are generally considered when describing student characteristics.

Profile of Curriculum Students

The typical curriculum student is most likely to be white, about 25 years of age, female and with an equal probability of being either married or single. She may be considered as head of the household and employed in a white collar occupation. The typical student is employed in a full or part-time job and earns less than $4.00 per hour. Married curriculum students have an annual income of about $12,000.

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*The findings reported herein have been taken from a draft of the final report, A Profile of Students in North Carolina Community Colleges and Technical Institutes, by Ronald W. Shearon, David E. Daniel, Lee McGraw Hoffman, Robert G. Templin, Jr., and Russell F. West. This report is expected to be complete in July of 1980, Raleigh, North Carolina.

This student attends class during the day on the main campus and takes one or two classes per quarter. The typical curriculum student is most likely to be enrolled in a technical program and to have ranked in the middle one-third of her graduating class.

Profile of Continuing Education Students

The typical continuing education student is most likely to be a white female, married, living with her spouse and approximately 38 years of age. Her 1978 family income was less than $10,000. She is a high school graduate; however, her parents had less than an eighth grade level of formal education.

The continuing education student is very likely to be enrolled in an occupational extension program attending classes in the evening at an off-campus site. She is enrolled in one class, attending less than five hours per week. She is employed either full or part-time.

The continuing education student is most likely to attend classes in her home county. She travels five or less miles to class one way and makes one trip per week.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CURRICULUM AND CONTINUING EDUCATION STUDENTS?

While there are similarities between curriculum and continuing education students, there are noticeable differences in several characteristics. Some of these differences are as follows:

-- Continuing education students are more likely to be female (71 percent) than are curriculum students (54 percent).
-- Curriculum students tend to be younger than continuing education students. The median age of curriculum students is about 25 years of age as compared to 38 for continuing education students.
-- Curriculum students (60 percent) are more likely to attend classes in the day than are continuing education students (39 percent).
-- Overall, curriculum students are more likely to have a higher level of formal education than are continuing education students.

ARE THE STUDENTS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ADULT POPULATION?

One of the major tenets of the comprehensive community college is the belief that a cross-section of the adult population should be enrolled in its programs. Based on the data in this study, the following findings are evident:

-- Community colleges and technical institutes tend to enroll a proportional cross-section of male and female students in curriculum program areas. In continuing education program areas, a higher proportion of females are enrolled than exist in the state's adult population.
-- In terms of race, the system enrolls a representative cross-section of both whites and blacks in curriculum and continuing education programs.

-- Students in curriculum programs are not representative of the adult population in terms of age. Older adults are underrepresented in curriculum programs. Continuing education programs enroll a representative cross-section of all major age groupings in the state's adult population.

-- Overall, adults with less than a high school level of education tend to be underrepresented in the student population.

-- The community college system tends to enroll a higher proportion of low income adults than exist in the state's adult population.

WHAT FACTORS ARE RELATED TO STUDENTS' DECISIONS TO ATTEND NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND TECHNICAL INSTITUTES?

Student decisions to attend a post-secondary institution are based on many factors. In this study, efforts were made to determine how the following factors were related to students' decisions to attend these institutions.

The Importance of Community Colleges and Technical Institutes

The important role played by community colleges and technical institutes in providing educational opportunities for the adults of North Carolina becomes especially clear in light of the following findings:

-- Nearly eight out of ten curriculum students indicated that the community college or technical institute in which they were enrolled was their first choice over all other forms of post-secondary education.
-- Ninety-five percent of the continuing education students chose the community college or technical institute as their number one choice for continuing their education.
-- Sixty-one percent of the curriculum students indicated that they would have attended another institution in order to further their education, had the institution in which they were enrolled not existed.
-- Nearly eight out of ten continuing education students indicated that they would not have sought educational opportunity elsewhere.

Influence of Institutional Characteristics

When students were asked what it was about the institutions which influenced their decisions to attend, a variety of responses were obtained. However, the following are perceived by curriculum and continuing education students as being the most important institutional characteristics (in a descending order of influence):

-- The programs available at the institution
-- The institutional location
-- The low cost
-- The quality of instruction

Reasons for Continuing Education

When students were asked their reasons for deciding to continue their education, major differences were found to exist between curriculum and continuing education students.

-- For curriculum students the most important reasons given suggest a chiefly economic motive: "to earn more money" and "to get a better job."

-- Continuing education students, while citing "to earn more money" as their second choice, overwhelmingly chose "to learn things of interest" as the most important reason for continuing their education.

Distance

Most students are not willing to travel long distances to attend class. Important findings are that:

-- Nearly six out of ten continuing education students travel fewer than five miles in order to attend class and 90 percent travel fewer than sixteen miles (one way).

-- Sixty percent of the curriculum students travel ten or fewer miles to class (one way).

-- Fewer than 9 percent of the curriculum and 3 percent of the continuing education students travel farther than 25 miles to attend class (one way).

Financial Aid

The availability of student financial aid has a great influence on a student's ability to attend a community college or technical institute. The results of this study indicate:

-- Approximately 40 percent of the curriculum students reported receiving some type of financial assistance.
-- Within curriculum programs, the largest proportion of students who are receiving financial aid is found in vocational (53 percent) and technical programs (50 percent) while the smallest proportion is found in special credit (7 percent) and college transfer (35 percent) programs.
-- The bulk of the financial aid awarded to curriculum students comes from Veterans Administration benefits (21 percent) and Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (13 percent).

Other Student Services

The following findings emerged as a result of students being asked to indicate what types of services they perceived as being important to them.

-- The most important services to curriculum students are parking facilities, followed by library resources and study areas.
-- Continuing education students perceive parking to be the most important service, followed by transportation provisions and library resources.

Students were asked to rate the quality of services offered at their institutions with the following results:

-- The services receiving the highest rating by curriculum and continuing education students are library resources and parking facilities.

-- Students in curriculum areas indicate a need for improvement in provisions for parking, recreational facilities and study areas, while continuing education students indicate a desire to have parking and eating facilities improved.

-- Curriculum students have the least amount of knowledge about the following services:

  · Child Care

  · Health Care

-- Continuing education students are least aware of the following services:

  · Child Care

  · Health Care

  · Stipends

HOW DO STUDENTS LEARN OF INSTITUTIONAL OFFERINGS AND WHO INFLUENCES THEIR DECISION TO ATTEND?

When asked to indicate how they first learned about program offerings, a variety of responses were given:

-- The largest proportion of curriculum students report that they first learned of the program through institutional literature, followed by institutional personnel and other students.

-- Continuing education students indicate institutional personnel, media and unspecified other factors as their first sources of information about institutional offerings.

Students have reported that several sources of information are influential in their decisions to attend community colleges and technical institutes. Some of the primary sources of influence are as follows:

-- Curriculum students are influenced most heavily by unspecified sources (which may represent self influence), followed by institutional personnel, the student's mother, other relatives and other students.

-- Continuing education students are most heavily influenced by institutional personnel, followed by unspecified others and other students.

HOW HAVE CURRICULUM AND CONTINUING EDUCATION STUDENT PROFILES CHANGED OVER THE LAST DECADE?

In order to determine what changes have occurred in curriculum and continuing education student profiles, data from the 1979 study were compared to similar data collected in 1974, 1969 and 1968. Some of the major changes and emergent trends follow:

Curriculum Student Profile Changes

-- There is a trend toward enrolling a larger proportion of female students, black students and students who are from the older adult population.

-- There has been an increase in the proportion of students who are either separated, divorced or widowed and a corresponding increase in the proportions of students maintaining "nontraditional" types of residence patterns.

-- There is a trend toward enrolling students from higher socioeconomic groups as measured in terms of education and income.

-- Curriculum students are typically attending more classes in the evening on a more part-time basis.

-- There has been a trend toward enrolling a larger proportion of students in technical program areas with a corresponding decrease in such liberal arts areas as college transfer and general education.

-- The decade has seen an increase and then a decrease in the proportion of students who plan to pursue a baccalaureate degree and the proportion who plan on being employed in North Carolina.

-- The enrollments in terms of the sex, race, age and education levels of students are becoming more representative of the North Carolina adult population.

Continuing Education Student Profile Changes

-- Over a period of ten years, there is a trend toward enrolling a larger proportion of female students and older students in the North Carolina Community College System.

-- The proportion of nonwhite students rose sharply and then declined over this ten year period of time.

-- The proportion of married students has declined while there has been an increase in the proportions of widowed, separated and divorced students.

-- There has been a trend toward enrolling a more well educated clientele and a clientele who are not working either full or part-time.

-- A larger proportion of continuing education students are enrolling in class during the daytime hours.

-- Students are increasingly being drawn from the county in which the institution is located and a larger proportion of these are repeating students.

-- The enrollments are becoming increasingly representative of the North Carolina adult population in terms of race and age.

WHAT ARE THE EMPLOYMENT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION PLANS OF NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE/ TECHNICAL INSTITUTE STUDENTS?

Students were asked what they planned to do upon completion of the program or course in which they were enrolled. The following are the major plans specified by students:

-- Nearly 40 percent of all curriculum students plan to work toward a baccalaureate degree. Over 85 percent of the continuing education respondents report little or no interest in working toward a baccalaureate degree. In fact, 15 percent of those students already have such degrees.

-- Nearly three out of ten continuing education students plan to enroll in a degree program at a later date.

-- Among more specific curriculum programs, 75 percent of the college transfer, 67 percent of the general

education and 41 percent of the technical students plan to work toward a baccalaureate degree, as did 25 percent of the special credit and 18 percent of the vocational students.

-- Nearly three out of ten vocational and technical students are undecided as to whether or not they should pursue a four-year college degree.

-- Seven out of ten curriculum students plan to work in North Carolina upon completion of their program.

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are based upon the findings of this study. North Carolina community colleges and technical institutes:

-- Serve a mature adult student population;

-- Enroll students who perceive of their local institution as the major vehicle for educational opportunity;

-- Are "on target" in providing occupational training for the people of North Carolina;

-- Have a large proportion of students who are unaware of the support services that are available;

-- Are attractive to students because of the programs available, location, and low cost;

-- Have been undergoing a change in the nature of their "comprehensiveness;"

-- Generally, serve an increasingly representative cross-section of the state's adult population;

-- Serve unique subpopulations which are not by themselves representative of the state's adult population;
-- Are undertaking recruitment efforts which weigh heavily in students' decisions to attend;
-- Are encouraging lifelong learning rather than one time only enrollments; and
-- Will find it necessary to offer programs in locations even more accessible to students in the years ahead.

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